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THESIS

"THE REALISM IN THE POETRY OF JOHN MASEFIELD"

SUBMITTED BY

JOSEPHINE JULIA SULLIVAN

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Masefield, John, 1878-
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# The Realism in the Poetry of John Masefield

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## I. THE POET'S LIFE AND EARLY EXPERIENCES A PREPARATION FOR HIS WORK AS A REALISTIC POET.

Lured by the love of the sea and adventure, John Masefield ran away from home at the age of fourteen and was indentured to a captain in the Merchant Marine. Possessor of a restless disposition he was not willing to follow his father and study law, but preferred to ship as a cabin boy on a sailing vessel and there he lived the life that found expression in his Salt Water Ballads. It is not to be supposed, however, that Mr. Masefield was an ignorant seeker for adventure or an unlettered boy, rather was he a serious inquirer for knowledge. In spite of his tender years he had been the recipient of a classical education. He was as surely born a man of letters as was Keats or Carlyle; he always had the desire to write and this longing was encouraged and guided by his mother. It was she who directed his early reading and fed the boy's sensitive imagination with the best that English tradition could offer. As a young boy, Mr. Masefield was a devoted admirer of Scott, Longfellow, and Tennyson. It was from these authors that he had learned many passages and he tells us that he was attracted to Du Maurier's "Ballad of Camelot" and moved deeply by the Pre-Raphaelite engravings contained in the volume. Even as a little boy he felt the impulse to put his dreams on paper and at the of nine John Masefield gave the first expression to his poetic inspiration, not great poems, but merely expressions of childish fancy; the first was about a pony and the second about a Red Indian, the latter inspired by Longfellow's "Hiawatha." As he grew older he transferred his admiration from Scott to Macaulay; he found the

"Lays of Ancient Rome" more modern and direct than Scott's works and it was at this time he began to delve into Milton's shorter poems. All this reading was completed before Mr. Masefield took up his life before the mast and after spending some six or seven years at sea we find him settled in New York City. Many and varied were his employments when he left his ship; he tried his hand at farming; he tended bar in the old Columbia Hotel in Greenwich Avenue and here he found plenty of time and opportunity to study human nature, finally we find him working in a carpet factory in the Bronx. His superior who had made his acquaintance in O'Connor's bar-room took an intense interest in Masefield, primarily, because both had come from Shropshire, Mr. Booth was one of the very few friends that Masefield made while in this country, for he was a very retiring and reticent youth, an observer of men rather than an intimate participator in their activities. Owing to his quiet and unobtrusive manner many people regarded him as a queer young man who, although he labored in the same environment as they, was not one of them. While at the carpet factory Masefield found his great god Chaucer, and in the very same year, 1896 began to read poetry with passion and system. Masefield literally haunted Mr. East's book shop, buying book after book. Pay day came on Friday and it was then that he was able to buy the volume he desired. At this time he read Keats, Shelley, Rossettie, Spenser, Shakespeare, DeQuincey, Dickens, Kipling, and Stevenson. He did not confine his attentions to literature but delved deeply into Huxley and Darwin. When he had finished reading these books, he did a singularly peculiar thing; where most men would covet their books, Masefield would bundle them up and take them down to

the Seaman's Mission on Fourteenth Street. Masefield spent at least two hours every day, five or more on Saturday and Sunday in the reading and study of the foremost English poets. His first attempts in verse were in the form of the sonnet in imitation of Keats, and it is in this form of verse that Masefield reaches perfection in his Sonnet Sequence.

Mr. Masefield, about this particular time entertained the idea of studying medicine, but owing to financial conditions was unable to help himself. Mr. Booth, knowing that Masefield had an uncle who was a successful lawyer in England, without John Masefield's knowledge, wrote to him asking financial aid, but for all his pains Mr. Booth received a very curt reply from that worthy gentleman, saying that as John had previously chosen to disregard the family's advice, he could do nothing for him. This reply put an end to the young man's ambition in the medical line. In 1896 after having spent two years working in the factory, Masefield decided to return to England and devote himself entirely to literature. He sailed for England in his old ship "The Conway" and settled in London where he lived in obscurity until 1912 when he received the Edmond de Polignac Prize on the publication of the "Everlasting Mercy."

During the world war Mr. Masefield fitted out a hospital ship at his own expense and served with the Red Cross in France. He was appointed historian for the Gallipoli campaign and the battle of the Somme. He also made a lecture tour of this country devoting most of his time to the army camps.

## II. MR. MASEFIELD'S POETIC THEORY

The poetic creed which John Masefield adopted and which he has faithfully sustained and strengthened in his later works of achievement is essentially[1] the poetic theory of the Romanticists, only enlarged to fit the broader experience into which the events of his own life have given him an enviable insight. His theory may be summed up in the preface to the Lyrical Ballads published by Wordsworth in 1798.

"The principal object, then, proposed in these Poems was to choose incidents and situations from common life, and to relate or describe them, throughout, as far as possible in a selection of language really used by men, and, at the same time, to throw over them a certain colouring of imagination, whereby ordinary things should be presented to the mind in an unusual aspect; and further, and above all, to make these incidents and situations interesting by tracing in them truly though not ostentatiously, the primary laws of our nature; chiefly, as far as regards the manner in which we associate ideas in a state of excitement. Humble and rustic life was chosen, because, in that condition, the essential passions of the heart find a better soil in which they can attain their maturity, are less under restraint, and speak a plainer and more emphatic language; because in that condition of our life elementary feelings coexist in a state of greater simplicity, and, consequently, may be more accurately contemplated, and more forcibly communicated; because the manners of rural life germinate from those elementary feelings, and, from the necessary character of rural occupations,

[1] Phelps - The Advance of English Poetry in the Twentieth Century.

are more easily comprehended, and are more durable; and lastly, because in that condition the passions of men are incorporated with the beautiful and permanent forms of nature."

Wordsworth's Preface embodies the essentials of the Romanticists theory, but Mr. Masefield, in carrying this theory to its farthest extremity has broken with the tradition of the nineteenth century just as Wordsworth broke with the eighteenth century. As a result, Mr. Masefield has developed a highly realistic theory of poetry which has been rejected by some of the modernists and welcomed by others.

When Wordsworth wrote this Preface, he followed these principles to a certain extent, making however, many explicit and implicit reservations. Never did he dream that his standards would be followed so literally in the work of succeeding poets. How truly has Mr. Masefield carried this theory into actuality and in many cases to its farthest extreme in his earlier productions, especially in the "Everlasting Mercy," "Dauber," "Daffodil Fields," and "The Widow in the Bye Street." When the "Everlasting Mercy" was awarded the Edmond de Polignac prize there arose a great hue and cry among the more conservative and orthodox poets and one even publicly denounced the work as a danger to the true standards of literature. Many of the critics of today agree with Stephen Phillips in his condemnation of Masefield's poetic creed. They fail to see that the tendency indicative in Masefield is not in mere details of diction, but goes deeper to fundamental integrities. It strives for a concrete and immediate realization of life, it would discard the theory, the abstraction, and the remoteness found in all classics not of the first order. His poetry is less vague and verbose, and

more simple, sincere, and individual; it is written in contemporary speech and possesses a truly authentic vitality of theme. Mr. Masefield feels that the poet is divinely gifted in that he feels and understands the beauty which is hidden from his less imaginative brethren. It is the poet's duty to search for unseen beauty, unknown by most of the world and bring it into their world through his personality and through the medium of his creative expression.

Many are they who go down to the sea in ships and see the works and wonders of the Lord, but they see them with no spiritual vision, with no self-consciousness, with no power to refer or to interpret. Occasionally, however, there springs up in this inarticulate myriad of men a John Masefield or a Joseph Conrad who sees and feels and has power to elucidate the wonders to which he has been witness and express them in the vernacular of the sailor. There are those who claim that Masefield over-emphasizes passion, brutality, and crudeness merely to make his works appear the more forceful and vigorous, but, here again he is merely adhering to his poetic theory so aptly expressed in Wordsworth's Preface. There is no doubt that Wordsworth would be well nigh shocked into insensibility to find modern poets so interpreting his dicta, intended to guide the poet to true greatness.

The poetic theory of Mr. Masefield finds expression, with one exception, in the principles laid down by the Imagist School. There is not the slightest deviation from the five principles, to use the exact word; to allow absolute freedom in choice of subject; to present an image; to produce poetry that is hard and clear; to study concentration; but Masefield most certainly takes exception

to the rule to create new rhythms. He has given no indication of creating new rhythms, rather has he unfaulteringly poured his song into traditional verse forms. In spite of this exception, however, we cannot deny that Masefield is wholly modern and contemporary. His poetry contains universality, for it is simple, sensuous, and passionate.

When asked what was the guiding motive in his writing, Mr. Masefield replied: "I desire to interpret life both by reflecting it as it appears and by portraying its outcome. Great art must contain these two attributes. Examine any of the dramas of Shakespeare, and you will find that their action is the result of a destruction of balance in the beginning. It is life, a cartful of apples, which is overturned. All the apples are spilled in the street. But you will notice that Shakespeare piles them up again in his incomparable manner, many bruised, broken, and maybe a few lost."

## III. THE REALISM IN MR. MASEFIELD'S POETRY.

The realism depicted in the works of John Masefield is the broader realism of recent years inspired by a faith in God and human nature. He has a sane and unprejudiced view of life; kings and lowly men are all just men, they are not to be scorned because they happen to be royalty any more than they are to be scorned because they happen to be laborers. He makes a conscious effort to be realistic, but he tells us in the beautiful "Consecration" prefixed to "Salt-Water Ballads" that he purposely omits from his work the Kings, Commanders, and Prelates, in order to sing of the stokers and chantymen; even will he descend to the dust and scum of the earth, for they are the ones who work, the others get the praise and the material returns; they are the inarticulate, but in Masefield they have found a spokesman. He has known and experienced their toil and privation and is ready to champion their lowly cause. It is his sense of robust humanity which evinces itself and triumphs in his deliberate choice of subject:

> "The men of the Tattered battalion which fights till it dies,
> Dazed with the dust of the battle, the din and the cries,
> . . . . .
> The sailor, the stoker of steamers, the man with the clout,
> The chantyman bent at the halliards putting a tune to the shout,
> . . . . .
> Of the maimed, of the halt and the blind in the rain and the cold--
> Of these shall my songs be fashioned, my tales be told."

Masefield responds consciously to the spirit of the times; from his own bitter and ugly experience with rough, brutal, decivilized creatures he saw the ugliest side of humanity and the most primitive savagery, and it is out of this experience that the realism of his art evolves. In spite of the fact that this realism is of the starkest type and terrible in its pathos, it is passionately sincere.

It filters through a sympathetic, understanding, truly spiritual personality, thereby imbuing the work with the compelling attraction of large human sympathy. "For every poem that he has written reveals two things: a knowledge of the harshness of life, with a nature of extraordinary purity, delicacy, and grace."[1] The criticism that Masefield writes passionately and violently of rough and common men, in order to give his works an appearance of strength, that he boldly and noisily overemphasizes the passions and emotions of untutored minds, that in noise and blatancy nobody can claim to outrival Masefield, is unnecessarily severe.[2] It is possible that Mr. Masefield overemphasizes passion and brutality but underneath the violence he captures that highly colored realism which is the poetry of life. There is in all of his works a peculiar blending of physical and spiritual exaltation that is striking and typical of Masefield. Many of his works in spite of their apparent rudeness are lifted to a plane of religious intensity by the battling forces of his genius. As a result of this struggle which we find manifest in his characters, we come upon a seeming clash of realism with romance. This bald, external realism has found much disfavor among those who will not see the spiritual intensity underlying the reality. The barriers of conservative criticism have been swept aside by the full tide of the vigorous, sustained, and irresistible imagination that pervades his work. In copiousness and variety, in originality and distinction, in their power to arrest our sympathies and to inflame and exalt the scope of our imagination Masefield has no superior among the contemporary poets.[3] He has amazing stories to tell and he has told them with the onrushing, overwhelming sweep of the mighty ocean which he loves to picture.

(Note: (1) Phelps; Advance of English Poetry in the Twentieth Century; (2) Expressions; taken from Williams; (3) Expressions; taken from Hamilton.)

The boldness and sincerity with which Mr. Masefield dares to express the love, jealousy, hate, revenge, and murder of the untutored is typically characteristic of his work before the advent of the World War. The critics who condemned his early work and justified their denunciation by citing the gaudiest and most blatant examples of external realism looked to Masefield at the time of the war for a lurid picture of wholesale murder; but amid the din of battle and fiendish slaughter, the poet expresses the anguish felt by all in the grave elegiac mood of "August 1914". It is indeed heartrending by the very contrast it presents with the vitriolic scene being enacted on the continent. "August 1914" seems to prepare us for a marked change in the work of the poet. It foreshadows the higher philosophy of life expressed in "Lollingdon Downs;" the more reasoned and less vehement emotion; the more frequent reminescences of traditional thought and imagery found in "Reynard the Fox", "Right Royal", "King Cole", and many shorter poems. On the publication of his post-war poems the majority of contemporary poets agreed that Mr. Masefield was hurt by the war, but Mr. Hamilton affirms that he has published nothing better than "Reynard the Fox". There is no doubt but the war has intensified his tenderness and gentleness; his sympathy with all living creatures is broadened and beauty evolves into something stern, lovely, and intellectual. Masefield has always felt keenly the underlying tragedy of the individual soul that he presented so powerfully. Fate mocked the individual soul, the Widow in the Bye Street suffers alone; Dauber dies practically alone, there is absolutely no one who really misses or grieves for him -- these episodes are isolated, they lack social background and continuity. This lack of social

background necessarily involves a lack of humor, of objective joy in sheer living which goes to make life endurable whenever there is a group of men gathered together. After reading the "Widow in the Bye Street" or "Daffodil Fields" the reader's spirit is rather crushed, he experiences rather a pessimistic outlook on life, and is inclined to look at everything in the world through blue glasses.

The newer realism in Masefield's more recent work shows a zest for life, and an intense joy in actual living. His later works delight no less in communion with humanity and portray a happier mental kinship with man. This newer realism evinced in Masefield shows a new born sense of continuity and gives to his work a universal appeal. Opinions seem to differ radically in regard to the perceptible change in Masefield's art; perhaps the following criticism made of the newer realism is radical because its author is an avowed radical - Amy Lowell characterized "Reynard the Fox" as poetry of escape, narrow and external. It may be said at this point that Masefield's realism becomes more and more objective in his later work and it is this objectivity that gives the work a more universal and enduring element. Amy Lowell does not agree, however, but says, "The war has hurt Mr. Masefield both in mind and spirit, he casts back pitifully and achingly upon the world he once knew and deeply loved. "Reynard the Fox" is really a cry of hunger for this past, a wave of nostalgic longing for the old, simple, thoughtless days of security and peace to preserve for his better comfort."

Previous to 1914 Mr. Masefield did not concern himself with the advance of modern science. We find no evidence that he was at all interested in the many and varied, and at the same time startling discoveries made in the scientific world. He was not moved to awe

by the rapid strides which science made, nor was he inspired to write of the marvelous mechanical inventions and their immediate effects on mankind. Mr. Masefield proves to us that he was not unaware of scientific advancement because in his latest works he explains psychological questions in an essentially modern scientific manner.

Salt Water Ballads, published in 1902 attracted very little attention from the public, though they were at once recognized in the literary papers. As one would expect these ballads are songs of the sea, telling of its beauty, humor, terror, magic, mystery, and hardship. The romance of the sea as told in these ballads actually tingles with reality. Mr. Wesselhoeft, of the University of Pennsylvania, says that there is no writer of the sea in English or German who has written with rude accuracy and understanding and powers of interpretation of sea life as Mr. Masefield. There is a lure from which there is no escape in "Sea Fever" - the poem is wholly subjective and expresses the urge of the poet's heart - the desire to return to the sea arises to an aching that will not be denied. There is a wistfulness and longing in the poem which cannot be escaped. "The West Wind" is also subjective but not so good as "Sea Fever" because the sentiment becomes trite, hackneyed and rather melancholy. Some of these ballads strike some readers as being unnecessarily brutal; they object to the unscrupulousness of the language, but in these poems Mr. Masefield is simply being true to life: he has not put these words into the mouths of men, rather is he the spokesman of a myriad of inarticulate men. The poems are written in the "lingo" of the fo'c's'le and tell boldly the thought and experiences of rough and "tough" sailormen on land and sea.

They picture storms, shipwreck, death, and the joys of the brief times ashore. There is, too, a group of songs based on the chanteys used by the sailors in performing their various duties aboard ship and a few of the sailor's drinking songs. In "The Yarn of the Lock Achray" Masefield has pictured in eleven stanzas what Pierre Loti impresses so fatalistically and pessimistically in his "Pêcheur d'Island." The beautiful ship that leaves the quay, wives, and friends only to be torn to pieces by the gale. It depicts vividly and realistically the tragedy, peril, and uncertainty of a sailor's life. While those friends await his return the poet says,

"Her crew made seven - and twenty dishes
For the big jack-sharks and the little fishes
And over their bones the water swishes."

Then, again we get that terrible description of the upturned whaler after the shipwreck, the sailor struggling frantically to gain a hold on the boat and then dragging the half dead "stooard" to safety. After a few days, the "stooard" goes insane and dies, much to the relief of his comrade. The awfulness of the experience makes the reader shudder.

Many of the ballads have to deal with death and show the callousness of brutal men; the needless loss of life and the utter disregard for human life. In spite of the sailor's seeming lack of sympathy for his comrade underneath his rough words we feel that this lack of wholesome sentiment arises from a fear of showing his true feeling of sympathy and sorrow for a deceased comrade.

There are those who say that Masefield's ballads are inferior to those of Kipling, but from a standpoint of reality Kipling is inferior to Masefield. Kipling's brutality is romantic. He merely observed the pain of the sea and of the sailors and felt that it

was suberb. Masefield's brutality is utterly realistic, for he has felt the pain, he has known their experiences. In "Evening Regatta Day" when one sailor is responsible for the ship's defeat the crew address the man in very crude language; but there is no attempt on Masefield's part to give a didactic meaning to the stanza, it is merely a straight description of human nature.

"Your nose is a red jelly, your mouth's a toothless wreck
And I'm atop of you, banging your head upon the dirty deck;
And both your eyes are bunged and blind like those of a mewling pup,
For you're the juggins who caught the crab and lost the ship the Cup."
. . . . .

For this reason Mr. Masefield is superior to Kipling who invariably makes brutality some sort of service to the ideals of Empire. Mr. Masefield talks in sailor "lingo;" Kipling in his soldier ballads created a soldier dialect which was readily adopted and popularized by the soldiers of the King. The abiding theme in Kipling's stories is the glorification of power which ultimately leads him to a glorification of brutality. This is not the case with Mr. Masefield, for he is more genuinely sympathetic than Kipling, for example, in "Fever Chills" he describes the sufferings of the sailor at the hands of his superior as Kipling has never attempted to describe it. The sailor, sick, and shaking, tottered about trying to perform his duties; he would be well in a very short time if he were given some quinine as the passengers, but the only satisfaction the captain gives is, "The best cure known for fever chills is shovelling bloody coal." Kipling would have seen only the magnificent grimness of the situation; Mr. Masefield sees also the pathos of it and does not disdain to add: "It's hard, my son, that's what it is, for us poor sailor-men." It is Mr. Masefield's large human sympathy which transforms the barbarity and crudity of the command.

In "A Valediction-Liverpool Docks" - the author gives a typical and singularly realistic account of the way in which most sailors are taken in and fleeced of their hard earned money by the land sharks in the water front drinking and gambling dens.

The sailor's attitude of indifference toward death is typically expressed in "Cape Horn Gospel" which is "written in Sailor Speech." The sailors tumbled their dead companion across the side and immediately after, before the captain knew, they began to divide the deceased's belongings. This indifference is due perhaps to the recurrence of the event and these simple hearted men are unable to show any sentiment as a result of the rough life they lead. The tone in which the sailor addresses the returned ghost of Billy has a sympathetic appeal and shows that down under his hardened exterior there was such a thing as a tender feeling. The entire poem is unflinchingly real, and to some, horrible in the baldness of the language - but it must be remembered that Mr. Masefield was a sailor, knew the seaman's character and speech and reproduces these tales in the original, natural language of the sailor. It is not to be supposed that the entire collection consists of a series of realistic horrors, for there are many of the ballads which manifest the poet's fancy and his rare and delicate sense of beauty.

Mr. Masefield has undoubtedly caught the dreamy languor of the isles of the Spanish Main as evidenced in "Spanish Waters" and "Trade Winds". These two ballads express their very atmosphere and reflect much of the glamour of the southern waters. They are songs that sing themselves into the memory of the reader. "Christmas Eve at Sea" shows the poet in a more restrained, more serious, and reflective mood; more concerned with the gentle beauty of nature than with

the grimness and stark horrors of death. It is a most effective and soothing poem. Although Mr. Masefield has gained much fame in his later works his sea poems remain his most remarkable achievement; he found his first inspiration in the unspeakable beauty of ships and he has reproduced the tang, look, and movement of the sea in a manner unsurpassed by any poet. In these ballads he has rendered the life of sea-faring men, not merely their wild romantic adventures on sea and shore, but the hard everyday experiences of the common sailor. He sings their songs in real sailor language and has, without doubt, shocked many prim and prudish readers who find no pleasure in realism when it is audacious and not mitigated by high sounding words and phrases.

It is no wonder that the literary men were dazzled by Mr. Masefield's publication of "The Everlasting Mercy" in 1911; for daring, realism, and originality it has no competitor. It is one of the world's great original poems as well as being one of the greatest religious poems ever created. It is a cry of defiance in the face of all sham religion and paganism. It explores with relentless and unflinching realism the rottenness of society down underneath the smug exterior. The poem was granted the Edmond de Polignac prize and was immediately opened to a volume of derogatory criticism owing to its lurid and reckless vocabulary. The intense realism of the first part has been denounced severely as being exceedingly unpleasant. Some say that there is no place in poetry for such a poem and many of the details should have been omitted; but Mr. Masefield is justified in his realism because it is only through pain that we know pleasure and it is by using this vigorous and violent contrast that the author can produce the desired effect. What could be more vivid than the description of the prize fight, round by round; re-

pulsive and repelling too, but who can deny the reality of the scene? Mr. Masefield has been severely criticised for daring to put such language into poetry, but in spite of this objection the reader is convinced of the author's sincerity because he never feels for one moment that the poet has succumbed to coarseness and vulgarity. Throughout the poem he feels the intense and fervent spiritual emotion of a spirit unblurred by its descension and contact with the ugliest phase of humanity. After the first rough, brutal, and almost blasphemous attack Mr. Masefield begins to tell of the spiritual transformation struggling to light in the soul of Saul Kane. Saul Kane, the village wastrel after having cheated his friend, fought and won a prize fight which was arranged to settle the affair. The fight was followed by an orgy of drunkenness where Saul goes blind drunk, but in the midst of the debauch for a marvelous instant he catches a glimpse of the filth and degradation in which he is actually buried. Thoughts of God and shame will not leave the man and suddenly he becomes conscious of his surroundings:-

"I opened window wide and leaned
Out of that pigstye of the fiend
And felt a cool wind go like grace
About the sleeping market-place.
The clock struck three, and sweetly, slowly,
The bells chimed Holy, Holy, Holy;
And in a second's pause there fell
The cold note of the chapel bell,
And then a cock crew, flapping wings,
And summat made me think of things.
How long those ticking clocks had gone
From church and chapel, on and on,
Ticking the time out, ticking slow
To men and girls who'd come and go,-"

An intolerant loathing of the place seizes Saul and a second fit of madness, wilder than the first, drives him about the town rousing people out of their sleep, who in turn attempt to catch the madman running half naked through the streets. He escapes and returns

to the tavern to sleep off his debauch. He awakes to another day of drunkenness and through the scorn and loathing which the mother of one of the children of the village heaps upon Saul when she finds him telling stories to her little son, he awakens to the realization of his wickedness and makes him see

"The harm I done by being me"

That very night in the pub the tall, pale Quakeress who visits such dens to perform rescue work hypnotizes him into conversion, convincing him of the enormity of his sins. The entire poem is unrivaled by anything in literature; by its powerful portrayal of the human emotions and the unquestionable reality of the experiences and environment of Saul Kane it has been unsurpassed. There is never any doubt about the facts. You are never allowed to question whether the scene is an actuality or an illusion. You see the prize fight; you are in the midst of the tavern brawl; and you actually feel your soul the recipient of the "Everlasting Mercy." Everything is intensely real.

"The Widow in the Bye Street" seems to be the exact antitheses of "The Everlasting Mercy" - in the latter, the wastrel is raised to a high spiritual plane and in the former, the innocent soul is dragged into the mire for no apparent reason. Surely, neither poem is an example of poetic justice.

"The Widow in the Bye Street" represents the starkest kind of realism. It is written in six parts setting forth a story pitilous in its reality, in its cruel representation of life as a kind of merciless fate playing a game - with human lives as stakes. It is the dreariest of Mr. Masefield's poems untouched by any ray or gleam of hope. The story, however, is pulsing with human life and passion and the characters are powerfully drawn. The whole atmosphere of the

poem is intensely real. It rises from calm to the fiercest passions of the human heart. It is a sordid story of a widow's son who, beguiled by an infamous woman, kills the lover of the woman with whom she is infatuated, and as a result is hanged for his crime, which however, was committed in a frenzy of jealous rage. Mr. Masefield traces powerfully the lust, brutality, and crime in this squalid tale. Mr. Masefield's justification of the undeserved tragedy is the victory of love in the heart of the wrecked and broken widow who in the end is bereft of her reason. After such a tumult of passion, suffering, and sorrow the reader heartily thanks the poet for depriving the poor, broken widow of her reason and allowing her to live the remainder of her life thinking the whole tragedy a horrible dream, and still awaiting the return of her Jimmy. The wayward passion of the young man has brought punishment to the just as well as the unjust but this fact does not lessen the reality of the theme, rather does it intensify it. It is in the recounting of such a reality that Mr. Masefield is able to lay claim to unquestioned originality. By depicting such evils and crimes in their true light the poet does an undoubted service to humanity, for a knowledge of such conditions tends in time to do away with such evils.

The characters are living, vital, creatures expressing their thoughts in their own language; they spring into life and become actual realities. What could be more direct, simple, true, and pathetic than the last conversation between the widow and her son; it is truth and pathos at white heat:

"The Lord has gave," she said, "The Lord has took;
I loved you very dear, my darling one,
And now there's none but God where we can look
We've got God's promise written in His Book,
He will not fail; but oh, it do seem hard."

. . . . .

"We were so happy in the room together,
Singing at 'Binger-Bopper,' weren't us, just?
And going a-hopping in the summer weather,
And all the hedges covered white with dust,
And blackberries, and that, and traveller's trust.
I thought her wronged, and true, and sweet, and wise,
The devil takes sweet shapes when he tells lies."

Mr. Masefield has been accused of lapsing into sentimentality in this poem, but Mr. Phelps affirms that, although constantly approaching the verge Mr. Masefield very skillfully avoids it. "The narrative," says Mr. Phelps, "is melodrama elevated into poetry. The mastery of the artist is shown in the skill with which he avoids the quagmire of sentimentality. He has known so much sentimentality, not merely in books and plays, but in human beings, that he understands how to avoid it." Yet there are other critics who disagree entirely with Mr. Phelps; Mr. Williams and Mr. Hamilton claim that the poet lapses more than once into sentimentality. The latter labels "The Widow in the Bye Street" with its many "obvious faults," as "food for parody." Mr. Van Doren in his latest publication remarks that "The Widow in the Bye Street" is equally as good as "The Everlasting Mercy." It is very evident from the diversity of opinion on the subject of Mr. Masefield's pathos that it is a matter of personal judgment whether or not he actually descends into the "quagmire of sentimentality." Mr. Williams cites a passage which he considers a striking example of sentimental moralizing:-

"So tea was made, and down they sat to drink;
O the pale beauty sitting at the board!
There is more death in women than we think,
There is much danger in the souls adored,
The white hands bring the poison and the cord,
Death has a lodge in lips as red as cherries,
Death has a mansion in the yew-tree berries."

The most powerful and touching passage in the entire poem is the closing scene which proves to be realistic to the very last degree.

"Singing her crazy song the mother goes,
Singing as though her heart were full of peace,
Moths knock the petals from the dropping rose,
The moon droops west, but still she does not cease,
The little mice peep out to hear her sing,
Until the inn-man's cockerel shakes his wing.

And in the sunny dawns of hot Julys,
The labourers going to meadow see her there.
Rubbing the sleep out of their heavy eyes,
They lean upon the parapet to stare;
They see her plaiting basil in her hair,
Basil, the dark red wound-wort, cops of clover,
The blue self-heal and golden Jacks of Dover,

Dully they watch her, then they turn to go
To that high Shropshire upland of late hay;
Her singing lingers with them as they mow,
And many times they try it, now grave, now gay,
Till with full throat, over the hills away,
They lift it clear; Oh, very clear it towers.
Mixed with the swish of many falling flowers."

In "Dauber" Mr. Masefield reaches the pinacle of his genious: although the poem is a true story, the poet has put a good deal of himself into the strange hero whose adoration for beauty lifted him above the brutal, sordid, and malicious crew of which he was a member. The Dauber's soul never for one moment succumbed to the environment although he was obliged to mingle with rough, brutal, decivilized creatures who did not possess one spark of appreciation for the beauties of nature and the soul.

The poem is written in seven parts; the first introduces Dauber as a very young man, anxious to become a painter. He goes to sea in order to prepare himself for his work, because his highest ambition is to paint the sea as no other has done. The sailors look upon the boy as a fool, wasting precious time daubing paint on canvas, and some of the more brutal members of the crew decide to play a trick on the Dauber by destroying his paintings. In the second part the Dauber discovers his work in ruins and makes a fruitless appeal to the captain and the mate. By appealing to his

superior officers for aid he breaks all the rules of the sailor's code; he gets no satisfaction. In part three the Dauber makes a friend in Si, a member of the crew, and recounts to him the history of his life, describing the rich country side where his father's farm was situated. He tells Si that he could not follow his father's occupation and that is the reason he is at sea. During the recital the sympathetic listener falls asleep and is discovered in the company of an inferior, thereby, breaking another of the unwritten rules of the sea. He is punished accordingly, and the Dauber immediately loses his new found friend. The fourth part describes the crew standing around Dauber as he paints, offering unpleasant, discouraging criticism of his work. In part five the ship is approaching the Horn and the Dauber is ordered to pack up his paints, for he will be needed. Dauber is nearly driven mad by the terrifying thoughts of going aloft in such storms as are met at the Horn. As the ship approaches the Horn it runs into one of the terrible storms experienced only near the South Pole and is held in its clutches for a month. The description of this storm is not equalled in English literature, for it reaches the zenith of such descriptions. Part six continues the description of the storm with intense reality, intense concreteness, and depicts the sailors' struggle with wind, water, and iceburg. The seventh and last part of the poem gives us a picture of the ship sailing majestically into port, but at the last command to go aloft the Dauber slips in the act of reefing a sail and is dashed to the deck and almost instantly killed.

Mr. Masefield shows himself at his best in "Dauber" - it is a sensitive record of the sea; full of the dangers to which sailormen are exposed; the endurance of ships and of men. On the face, it

appears to be an unmitigated tragedy, but is it not consoling to believe that the Dauber lived his life when his brave spirit triumphed over frail flesh and sordid environment? Mr. Masefield does not moralize in "Dauber" as he occasionally did in the "Widow in the Bye Street" but gains a peaceful conclusion by turning from men to the majesty of nature, thereby casting a consoling veil over the tragedy of "Dauber." There are so many passages that are representative of Masefield's dazzling realism it is almost impossible to determine which is the best. The entire poem, in diction and in fact is unsurpassably realistic.

"Water and sky were devil's brews which boiled,
Boiled, shrieked, and glowered; but the ship was saved.
Snugged safely down, though fourteen sails were split.
Out of the dark a fiercer fury raved.
The grey-backs died and mounted, each crest lit
With a white toppling gleam that hissed from it
And slid, or leaped, or ran with whirls of cloud,
Mad with inhuman life that shrieked aloud."

Mr. Masefield is at his best in the fierce conflict of human wills. He shows the Dauber scourged by the elements until all sense is lost but that of physical torture -

"He caught one giddy glimpsing of the deck
Filled with white water, as though heaped with snow.
. . . . . all was an icy blast.
Roaring from nether hell and filled with ice,
Roaring and crashing on the jerking stage,
An utter bridle given to utter vice,
Limitless power mad with endless rage
Withering the soul;"

. . . . .

"His bunk was sopping wet; he clambered in,
None of his clothes were dry; his fear recurred.
Cramp bunched the muscles underneath his skin.
The great ship rolled until the lamp was blurred.
He took his Bible and tried to read a word;
Trembled at going aloft again, and then
Resolved to fight it out and show it to men."

What is most interesting in "Dauber" is the beauty that Mr. Masefield has gathered from his own experiences at sea. Mr. Masefield

catches in words the thoughts that "occur within the painter's brain" like "bright birds". The poet has conjured up for us pictures of men at work on yards and deck as vivid and real as any pictures of sea life ever written.

"The Daffodil Fields" is the old unhappy story of a girl who loved the rover. The story is concerned with the daffodil fields along a Shropshire stream. The setting is so accurately given that Mr. Booth, Mr. Masefield's superior in the factory at Yonkers and a native of Shropshire, remarked that the descriptions brought back immediately his boyhood days and the beautiful fields of daffodils. The story is divided into parts and each part ends by reference to the daffodils. It is a tale powerfully told, opening with the death of old Nicholas Gray whose son Michael, "Young April on a blood horse, with a roving eye," is away from home studying in a foreign University. Mary Keir and Lionel Occleve, both neighbors of the Grays go to telegraph to Michael to inform him of his father's illness. Michael comes home unexpected, but not before his father has died. Mary, Michael, and Occleve are all approximately of the same age,- Mary loves Michael who loves the beautiful girl for her beauty only, while Lionel loves her truly. Shortly after Nicholas Gray's death, Michael decides that Shropshire is too tame promising to return in three years and marry Mary. This decision gives Mr. Masefield a splendid opportunity to describe the South American plains, which he does with his usual mastery. In Argentina, Michael succumbs to immorality and seems to thrive on such a life, forgetting completely his troth to Mary. Lionel goes to South America on business and looks up Michael whom he finds living with a dark-eyed Spanish beauty. Lionel returns to England and tells Mary what he must, and

shortly after, Mary and he marry. When Michael learns of the marriage he returns to England and trouble begins. When Mary sees him his old domination of her returns, and she tells her husband that she is going to leave him and live with Michael. Lionel agrees, knowing it is useless to try to keep her and we find Michael and Mary living together in the same neighborhood. After a short space of time Mary decides to return to her husband since Michael shows signs of restlessness and is anxious to rove once more. Michael brings news of Mary's decision to Lionel, but before he gets an opportunity to deliver his message Lionel enraged at the sight of his rival, insolent in his beauty attacks him, and in the course of the struggle Lionel is mortally wounded. Lionel asks Michael to bring him water - Michael crawls with it to him and is stabbed by a knife that Lionel has concealed. When Mary arrives on the scene, Michael is dead and Lionel dying. Lionel's last moments are spent listening to Mary lamenting over the body of Michael. The two men are brought to "The Roughs" farm and with coming of the dawn Mary dies.

"The Daffodil Fields" is without doubt a wildly, exciting tale, the reality of which cannot for a moment be doubted, provided that we accept Mary. It is in hercharacter alone, that we might question the reality of the story. It is easily comprehended how she was forced into marriage with Lionel after her own home was broken up and she was left alone in the world. It is a little difficult to understand how Mary, brought up as she was in the pure, wholesome, atmosphere of a well-to-do form district, could have so little moral character, and such a meager sense of ethical values as to desert her steady, upright husband and live with Michael when he returned from the Pampas.

Mr. Masefield does not approach his usual high mark, either in originality or diction in "The Daffodil Fields," coming as it did after "The Widow in the Bye Street." It lacks the rapidity and the inspiration of the latter. In spite of this fact "The Daffodil Fields" contains charming pages of natural description, but unfortunately it is only here and there that the poet rises to his usual heights. Occasionally, scenes and characters are portrayed with his natural power. He captures in all its loveliness and beauty the country of the Argentine and in a few quick, masterful strokes he makes his characters living beings. Michael, the handsome, carefree, debonaire rover is not a mere puppet but a reality; Lionel and Mary are drawn with the same distinctness and mastery. In "The Daffodil Fields," however, Mr. Masefield has exposed himself to the charge of "bad taste" and "raw melodrama." If we consider that realism is marked chiefly by a preference for the ordinary and commonplace in contrast with the strange and unusual, "The Daffodil Fields" has failed in its claim to be realistic, at least, in plot. The plot of the narrative is not, we hope, commonplace but rather an unusual reality. In this particular poem it may be objected that Mr. Masefield's realism is far stranger than out and out romanticism. This, however, results from the fact that one side of life, the sordid, has been disproportionately emphasized. In true realism we have the pleasure of recognition; in spite of sharply individual lines or local tints, we discover qualities that are universal, which belong, not to persons, time or locality, but to all mankind the world over. The above elements are, with exception of the first, embodied in "Daffodil Fields." It can be said, in spite of the rawness of the subject matter and the over-romantic heightening into melodrama that the narrative gives "proof of Mr. Masefield's sur-

passing gift for lovely language; and it has helped to consolidate his position as the most commanding of the younger English poets."[1] Mr. Phelps disagrees with the above charge, stating definitely that "The Daffodil Fields" is not melodrama. "It is a poem of extraordinary beauty. Every time I read it I see in it some 'stray beauty-gleam' that I missed before. It would be impossible to translate it into prose; it would lose half its interest, and all of its charm."[2] "The Daffodil Fields" is worthy of more than one reading, not only for the many realistic descriptions, the powerful portrayal of the conflict of human wills, but also for the many passages of true beauty which on first reading escape the eye of the casual reader.

"Lollingdon Downs," a series of lyrics and sonnets, is quite unlike anything that Mr. Masefeild has written, being produced in what we might call the poet's period of translation. Of all Mr. Masefield's books it is the hardest to apprehend, especially, as it comes from the pen of one who in his previous simplicity, clarity, and reality of thought and expression has been unsurpassed. The book is entirely different from either the "Sea Ballads" or his longer narrative poems, both in subject matter and diction. This fact does not indicate that Mr. Masefield is less modern or original than he has been in his earlier production, for, in choice of subject, diction, and in his thoughts, expressed in the Shakesperean stanza, he is exceedingly modern. In both "Lollingdon Downs" and his Sonnet Sequence he is seeking knowledge of the soul and personality. The impression produced by the Sonnets is one of pessimism - a groping, a searching for the soul, which is not satiated. "What is this life which uses living cells

1. Van Doren - American and British Literature Since 1890.
2. Phelps - The Advance of English Poetry in the Twentieth Century.

It knows not how nor why, for no known end,-"

The poet finds no answer to his restless, questioning of here and the hereafter - "It may be, that we cease; we cannot tell
Even if we cease, life is a miracle."

The whole tendency of thought indicates a skeptical attitude toward man and God on the part of the poet. The sonnets show that the author is a typically modern realist. There is realism in the whole drift and texture of thought. They grapple with the modern psychological and biological trend of thought. The Sequence is most essentially original in that the poet uses modern scientific subjects and expresses them in truly poetic style. Although Mr. Masefield treats his subject in a purely scientific manner we do not come away with the same certainty as scientific treatment usually instills. The entire Sequence deals with Beauty, but that Beauty is something vague, transient, and elusive. The Sonnets are not articulate; the poet is struggling valiantly to express his thought, he approaches it, slips back, comes near again, only to be baffled in the end. The sonnets tantalize the reader in their very elusiveness, but the reader unconsciously feels that the poet himself knows scarcely any better what he is attempting to put into concrete form: the Sonnets approach scientific truth emotionally -

"What am I, Life? A thing of watery salt
Held in cohesion by unresisting cells,
Which work they know not why, which never halt,
Myself unwitting where their Master dwells,
I do not bid them, yet they toil, they spin;
A world which uses me as I use them,
Nor do I know which end or which begin
Nor which to praise, which pamper, which condemn.
So, like a marvel in a marvel set,
I answer to the vast, as wave by wave
The sea of air goes over, dry or wet,
Or the full moon comes swimming from her cave,
Or the great sun comes north, this myriad I
Tingles, not knowing how, yet wondering why."

From the Sonnets we gather that Mr. Masefield reaches the decision that Beauty is purely subjective.

"Out of your bounty very beauty flowth.
For you are all, all fire, all living form,
Marvel in man and glory in the worm."

The Sonnet Sequence taken as a whole is truly beautiful in spite of the fact that we are left in uncertainty. The diction and thought are unquestionably original, and Mr. Masefield never for one moment ceases to be a poet. The many tributes to Beauty, especially to Beauty as she reveals herself in nature, are superb. Throughout the Sequence we run across innumerable thoughts exquisitely expressed but with that undercurrent of sadness, which at times approaches pessimism. The poet, through his innate sense of Beauty stretches out in the darkness to grasp a more extensive knowledge - an undiscovered law which has hitherto been unrevealed to mankind. Everything which is in the world is but a phantom, an hallucination which exists for a brief space and then disintegrates into dust or ashes; both animate and inanimate objects have the same fate.

"Roses are beauty, but I never see
Those blood drops from the burning heart of June
Glowing like thought upon the living tree,
Without a pity that they die so soon,
Die into petals, like those roses old,
Those women, who were summer in men's hearts
Before the smile upon the Sphinx was cold,
Or sand had hid the Syrian and his arts."

The nineteenth and twenty-fourth lyrics included in "Lollingdon Downs" might well be considered fragmentary anticipations of "Reynard the Fox." The former, "Midnight," prepares us for the setting and the desperate struggle of the heroic Reynard. The latter is an anticipation of what we might justly call the Prologue to "The Ghost Heath Run" for Mr.

Masefield in his own singular power of characterization drives home all of a person, appearance, personality, character, and temperament in a few short lines. In twenty-six lines we find the lives of ten characters; their personal appearance, reminiscences of their youth and the joy and tragedy experienced by each over a span of years.

"Lollingdon Downs" and the Sonnets show more reasoned and less vehement emotion, with more frequent reminiscences of traditional thought and imagery than the naked reality of his earlier poems.

After the quiet, philosophical, mood expressed by Mr. Masefield in "Lollingdon Downs" he unexpectedly returned to the recital of a blood and thunder romance in 1918, when he published "Rosas." One would almost suspect Mr. Masefield of composing "Rosas" before "Lollingdon Downs," for it is characteristic of his early work. It is a truly plausible tale, and in spite of the glaring metrical errors it may be said, that the story is unflinchingly told, and having once started to read the narrative the reader will, without the least hesitation, read the poem to the finish. It is undoubtedly a gripping and tragic tale of two innocent children sacrificed to the political power of the State. Unlike Mr. Masefield's earlier work, the tragedy is not that of the individual soul but the tragedy of a nation, and through the untimely death of the young lovers a whole nation was delivered from the scourge of the tyrant. This fact offers consolation to the reader for the horrible and premature death of the young couple. The poem does not proceed with the same rapidity as does many of his other narratives, but the plot is arresting and the retardations and padding are

not so evident as they might be if the plot was less gripping or less realistically given.

"Enslaved," published in 1920 is a poetic narrative typical of Mr. Masefield's more recent realism. He does not deal with the individual soul tragedy but the triumph of certain racial qualities. The introduction creates an atmosphere of beauty and romance indicating with unusual clarity the poet's love and true sympathy with the soul of the wild things of the forest. In this exultant mood the poet reveals his own sensitive soul in the apparent joy he experiences in the happy song of the English lark and blackbird. In his heart is implanted a true kinship with the little animals of the world. After the first tribute to the beauties of nature the reader begins to feel that the cruel, unrelentless fingers of fate are about to drag away the veil of beauty and lay bare a hideous tragedy; the details of which are supressed to a certain extent, but those that are depicted are sufficiently vivid to give an incomparable picture of the catastrophy. The veil has lifted, and we see the smoking ruins of a once supremely happy home, a heap of charred ashes, razed to the ground by a marauding band of pirates.

> "And the place was like a death-house save for cawings overhead,
> All the cocks and hens were silent and the dogs were like the dead,
> Nothing but the smoke seemed living, thick and hiding whence it came,
> Bitter with the change of burning, hot upon the cheek from flame."

When the young lover finds that the Marauders have carried his loved one away to heathen lands, he unhesitatingly follows the ship sailing toward the East and gives himself up to the

pirate captain so that he might be near his fiancee. He submits to the yoke of slavery in the hope that in some way he may win freedom for both.

The picture of the Persian galley is matchless, and Mr. Masefield again shows his power to portray character in a few dashing strokes:-

"Then her captain came on deck, quick and hard, with snapping force,
And a kind of cringe of terror stiffened down those banks of care."

The agonies of slavery and the hardships of the voyage are depicted with the usual intensity and reality found in his more unbridled narratives. Just before the youth is to be betrayed by Duhamel, Mr. Masefield gives a startling picture of the prison caves as Gerald leads the unsuspecting youth to freedom:

"Some gamblers crouched tense, while a lean hand flickered
the cards"-

. . . . .

"He led me up a slope where rats carousing
Squealed or showed teeth among the tumbled housing,
Half ruined wooden huts, or lime-washed clay."

Following the desperate struggle for freedom and the rescue of the fair girl from the woman's house of the Khalif the unfortunate refugees are captured by the Khalif and his soldiers. The Khalif sentences the three victims to death, and it is here that Mr. Masefield's newer realism evinces itself. In the days previous to the war it would be expected that the poet would give a horrible, vivid, and unflinching description of the deaths of the victims, but here, Gerald, really in desperation, and the one desire to let the Khalif realize that death to the Christian free-born was preferable to life under the bonds of a heathen slave holder, stuns the tyrant by volleys of indignation and condemnation; the very courage of the man inspired awe and fear in the listeners and admiration in the mind of

Khalif who manifests his respect for such a courageous spirit by freeing all three captives and providing for their passage to their native land. The joy of the three is manifested by the fact that once again they can see the beauties of nature and allow them to reflect consciously in their own hearts - through sorrow the greater joy is experienced:

"All early in the Maytime when daylight comes at four,
We blessed the hawthorn blossom that welcomed us ashore.
O beautiful is this living that passes like the foam
It is to go with sorrow yet come with beauty home."

"The Hounds of Hell" is a concrete interpretation of the attacks of the devil upon the human soul. The devil is depicted as a black demon riding through the world on a black charger, accompanied by a pack of savage hounds who represent the instruments of his power. The pursuit of the soul of man by the demon is vividly and realistically given. The hoof beats of the demon's charger echoing in the soul of man clothes Mr. Masefield's philosophy in extremely realistic terminology. Man dares to believe he has the power to resist, but the frail flesh succumbs to the overpowering strength of the fiend. Saint Withiel succumbs like others of the human race - just as Saint Peter when he denied Jesus,- but he is prompted by celestial spirits to:-

"Open the doors, good saint," they cried,
Pass deeper to your soul;
There is a spirit in your side
That hell cannot control."

There is an echo of the philosophical thought embodied in his Sonnet Sequence:

"Open the doors to let him in,
That beauty with the sword;
The hounds see silly shapes of sin,
They shrivel at a word."

"Animula" is the very old story of two men loving the same

beautiful woman told in a supressed mood totally unlike that of "The Widow in the Bye Street." There is no violence, and the woman, in spite of temptation remains pure, but the bridled spirit finally finds relief in suicide. The tale is very touchingly told with the ever present undercurrent of unconquerable fate flowing through the entire narrative. The realism is less bald and stark; the individual descriptions of the tragedies merely hinted at, not given step by step. Perhaps Amy Lowell had "Animula" in mind together with "Reynard the Fox" when she said that Mr. Masefield's more recent poetry is "the poetry of escape." "Lemmings," contained in this same volume, is reminiscent of Matthew Arnold's poetry of doubt - especially "Dover Beach."

"Perhaps, long since, there was a land beyond
Westward from death, some city, some calm place,
With the little beauty of a human face;"-

. . . . .

"But now the land is drowned, yet still we press
Westward, in search, to death, to nothingness."

In "The Dream" the poet feels crushed by the complexities of life and the fruitlessness of labor - as it all ends in death, the cessation of bodily activity. While meditating on death the poet falls asleep and wanders through the halls of an Old Castle on whose walls the story of life is woven in beautiful tapestries. Here and there as he drifts in the realm of unreality we come upon realistic touches which immediately bring us down from the heights of Parnassus. As he wanders through the castle he sees:-

"Intense souls painted in their joy"

and then directly -

"There, flattered to a smile, the barn cat lay
Tasting the sun with purrings drowsily

Sun-soaked, content, with drowsed green-slitted eye."

The entire panorama of life, every phase of life, is woven carefully in these tapestries hung on the castle walls and Mr. Masefield describes each, truly and accurately.

There is a suppressed rebuke in "The Woman Speaks" to all who spend a life time seeking for useless, empty, pleasure. She took all the physical joys life offered, and found them but ashes,- the city night-life, the hustle of the city, all the things that seemed worth while suddenly become empty experiences when she wanders through the quiet, peaceful, contented village. Life for her could have been like this, but now it is too late to break the chains linked together by all the habits of the old frivolous life.

"The Builders" gives us a strikingly clear picture of the men who build; obliged to leave their beds before break of day while the last stars hang in the sky-- they drag themselves out of the house, too drowsy to talk, to think, or to see the beauties lurking along the country-side as they go on their way to work. Then they must work, and work intensely under supervision:-

"Then, clink, clink, clink, men's trowels tapped the brick." Finally when the edifice is completed - "the delicate man who built the tower" - looks with satisfaction and joy on the results of his efforts; he is the creator, the builders mere tools; he has commanded men, strong men, machines, all manner of art and skill to do his bidding. Now he experiences a supreme joy,- pride to think that he, a delicate, weak man, through the power of his own intellect has reared out of the earth's raw materials a monument of human skill.

Mr. Masefield treats with quick sympathy and accuracy the woes and misfortunes of the itinerant showman in "King Cole". The travelling circus led by the crushed showman and his grumbling artist-comrades are led to fame, fortune, and happiness by the Spirit of King Cole who is permitted still by the "Judges of Heaven" to wander through the world perpetuating the good deeds of his earthly rule. The poem is not so exciting and impetuous as "Right Royal" or "Reynard the Fox" but it has accomplished its purpose in that it has truly, accurately, and vividly portrayed the wandering life of the circus player. The whole poem is permeated by the atmosphere of the show; portraying the emotions of the players; arousing compassion for the conditions of the players; the worn-out impatient, grumbling, rebellious troupe; the broken showman accepting stoically the cruelties of fate. Then, the poet turns to the Royalty, depicting the Prince whom the common people believe to be the happiest, most fortunate of men, but who really is farther from freedom and happiness than the wandering minstrels; literally chained by convention to a life of dutiful misery. The poem rouses once again, the first thrill of the circus as experienced in childhood; it brings back the glamor, the tinsel, and the excitement of the show as it paraded into the city or the town grounds. Beside the external brilliancy of the circus, Mr. Masefield describes the circus from the point of view of the participants - the labor, the hardships, and the woes are incomparably expressed:

"Wearily plodding up the hill they went,
Broken by bitter weather and the luck,
Six vans, and one long wagon with the tent.
And piebald horses following in the muck,
Dragging their tired hooves out with a suck,

And heaving on, like some defeated tribe
Bound for Despair with Death upon their kibe."

Following the repairing of the broken axle, an added blow to the misfortunes of the beaten showman, we get an insight into the mental tortures of the man and also his silent despairing wife -

"From time to time a haggard woman's face
Peered at him from a van, and then withdrew;"

Mr. Masefield then characterizes with splendid clarity the individual members of the troupe.

"the second clown, a snub-nosed youth,
Fair-haired, with broken teeth, discoloured black,
rolled a cigarette and begged a light."

Old Circus John growled to the juggler as he sucked his briar uttering the prophecy that the failure of the circus was due to the introduction of women to the troupe. There are some splendid descriptions of the Juggler, Molly, and the Cowboy's "Cat-eyed wife." The pictorial power revealed in the poem startles and thrills the reader and the passages devoted to cataloguing flowers and butterflies are strikingly reminiscent of passages in Chaucer.

The poem is undoubtedly weakened by the ever present supernatural element but the musical and imaginative grace of the author as displayed, enhances his reputation. The closing lines of the poem are truly beautiful -

"Out of the living world of Christendom
He dimmed like mist, till one could scarcely note
The robin nestling to his old grey coat,

Dimmer he grew, yet still a glimmering stayed
Like light on cobwebs, but it dimmed and died.
Then there was nought but moonlight in the glade,
Moonlight and water and an owl that cried.
Far overhead a rush of bird's wings sighed,
From migrants going south until the spring,
The night seemed fanned by an immortal wing."

Scarcely a year elapsed between the publication of "Reynard the Fox" and the vigorous poem of a steeplechase tale in verse, "Right Royal." In this thrilling and racy tale Mr. Masefield has continued his paean of English sports and open air. Mr. J. C. Squire will not admit that this narrative approaches the perfection attained in "Reynard", for the descriptions are less vivid, less clearly focused; however, we are none the less breathless from start to finish in "Right Royal." There is no plot in the narrative. Charles Cottrill rides his own horse Right Royal; the animal is a thoroughbred but in every race run, he has proved a failure. Young Cottrill has a dream that he will be victorious in this race in spite of his previous failures and as a result he stakes his entire fortune on his own horse. If he loses his own future will be jeopardised; he will be unable to marry the girl he loves and he will be left without a penny. The intensity of supressed emotion permeates the narrative. The rider feels that every fiber in Royal's body is responding to his own spirit; both share the feeling that this is their day.

The narrative opens with an accurate description of the different classes of people that frequent the race track; peddlers crying their wares, representatives from the poor, and middle classes, and the royalty. The entire grandstands sway with the crowds, whose emotions are keyed to the highest possible point; the bookmakers are gathering in the stakes and finally the horses and jockeys are nervously pacing and pawing the ground. Waiting for the crack of the gun - the horses:

"Flung white foam as they stampled their hate
Of passionate blood compelled to wait,"

The one thought of the reader from start to finish is - is Royal going to win? The field is huge and we go twice round the course; there are thirty horses and twenty-eight jumps; many accidents at every hurdle and at one our hearts drop when Royal falls, then recovers, but is thirty lengths behind. There exists a perfect harmony of spirit between horse and rider - the latter, his heart a leaden weight cannot force his horse but the noble animal braces himself and takes his own bridle - passing steadily one racer after another until he reaches the foremost six; still Charles does not force his horse, he cannot. When all other riders are beginning to use the spur and lash he makes no effort to urge Right Royal - without spur or lash the fiery blooded brute makes a spontaneous effort at the crucial moment and in the glory and pride of his power makes a desperate finish, winning by half a length. Speed and vividness are the distinguishing characteristics of this narrative; the interest and emotional intensity of the reader are strained and held taught to the very end. It is with a beating heart and racing pulse that the reader finally flies toward the post; it is he who is riding Right Royal and not Charles Cottril -

"Right Royal went past him, half an inch, half a head,
Half a neck, he was leading, for an instant he led;
Then a hooped black and coral flew up like a shot,
With a lightning-like effort from little Gavotte.

The little bright mare, made of nerves and steel springs,
Shot level beside him, shot ahead as with wings.
Charles felt his horse quicken, felt the desperate beat
Of the blood in his body from his knees to his feet.

Three terrible strides brought him up to the mare,
Then they rushed to wild shouting through a whirl of blown air
Then Gavotte died to nothing; Soyland came once again
Till his muzzle just reached to the knot on his rein.

Then a whirl of urged horses thundered up, whipped and blown,
Soyland, Peterkinooks, and Red Embers the roan.
For an instant they challenged, then they drooped and were done;
Then the white post shot backwards, Right Royal had won."

"The persons, horses, and events described in this poem are imaginary. No reference is made to any living person or horse." The poet has created this event, but it will undoubtedly live in the memory of the reader as vividly as any actuality.

"Good Friday" is an unfinished morality in rimed verse on the Passion day of Christ. The intrusion of the symbolic madman becomes offensive before very long but the account of the Crucifixion recited by Longius to Pilate is moving and awful in its very simplicity. The passage is too long to quote but it is dignified, fine, and supremely visualized. It is a most remarkable description of the last hours of Jesus' earthly existence.

Another play in rimed verse, "Philip the King", draws its plot from a purely tradition source. It outlines the building and the destruction of the superb Spanish Armada. Mr. Masefield in his own unrivaled manner describes the fleet as it sails majestically out of the Spanish harbor; at the moment of disaster the poet does not balk in the recital of the horrible fate of both ships and men.

"Under our tattered flags,
With rigging cut to rags,
Our ships like stricken stags
Were heaped and hounded
Caught by the unknown tide,
With neither chart nor guide
We fouled the Holland side
Where four more grounded."

"The wounded raved and cursed, uncared, untended -"

. . . . .

"Now our hearts failed, for food and water failed.
The men fell sick by troops, the wounded died

They washed about the wet decks as we sailed
For want of strength to lift them overside,
Desolate seas we sailed, so grim, so wide,
That ship by ship our comrades disappeared."

The description of the conquest of Mexico is as vividly pictured by Mr. Masefield as Prescott's remarkable prose description. The humilities suffered by the proud Indians at the hands of merciless and lusty Spaniards reminds us of a more recent attempt at conquest by the German Nation; the words uttered by Philip the King might very well have been uttered by the German Kaiser - "Those who obstruct my path,- I sweep aside."

## IV. CHAUCER'S INFLUENCE ON MR. MASEFIELD.

Although Mr. Masefield discovered Chaucer in 1896 while at work in a Yonker's carpet factory, there is no evidence of the great Master's influence until nearly twenty years after the introduction. Then, without any previous warning Mr. Masefield published three of his narrative poems in the beautiful rime royal invented by Chaucer. The form lent itself admirably to Mr. Masefield's purpose, for it adapts itself ideally to narrative as shown in the famous narrative "Troilus and Criseyde." It is curious that the twentieth century poet should choose such a stately and traditional form of expression when we find how truly modern he is in his thought and subject matter. In "The Widow in the Bye Street", "Dauber", and "Daffodil Fields", the latter with a slight variation, Mr. Masefield uses the form with a mastery unequalled by any modern.

As Chaucer drew his material from events and personages of everyday life so also does Mr. Masefield. Chaucer's greatness depends on the endless variety of beauty and charm; on the realistic portrayal of human types and human nature, contained in his works. In these respects it might be said Mr. Masefield is a worthy rival of the great Master, although the former is greatly inferior to the latter in that very essential element, humor. Throughout Chaucer's work there lurks that sly humor which gives the work a very delicate charm, and which adds tremendously to the realism. "Setting aside the wonderful felicity of phrase and sparkling humor which characterize nearly all his maturer works, the peculiar greatness of the Prologue to the Canterbury Tales may be said to reside in the vividness of its individual

portraiture and its truth to reality in describing the various types representative of the fourteenth century."[1] The portraits given in the Prologue are not only vivid and individual but through the individual Chaucer also embodies the type. In the description of the Prioress, Chaucer depicts the conventional type of young woman, gentle and refined. He paints for us in the vivid person of the Wife of Bath the exact antithesis of the Prioress; a free and easy type unhampered by convention. To show her absolute freedom, Chaucer recounts that worthy lady's many pilgrimages abroad. It is the individual character of the several portraits which gives to the Canterbury Tales its realism. The entire work is a panorama of the life of the fourteenth century as it passed before the eyes of Chaucer.

It is through this same means that Mr. Masefield has gained such a powerful grip upon reality. Through his many individual characters which are undoubtedly real, vital, living creatures, Mr. Masefield portrays the types common to the life of the twentieth century. The life of the Middle Ages lent itself more easily to such a process of portraiture owing to the fact that society was organized on a "choice communistic basis"[1]; life was less complex; and craftsmen were banded together in guilds; whereas today, the typical is lost, in most cases, in the individual as far as dress and class distinction is concerned. Human nature, fortunately remains the same throughout the ages and it is through character that Mr. Masefield successfully portrays type.

Mr. Masefield's most striking resemblance to Chaucer is not found among his early works but among his later publications,

1. Root - "The Poetry of Chaucer."

especially "Reynard the Fox". The poet has chosen a phase of modern English life where the type is not lost in the indivi-ual but stands out in marked contrasts to the other phases of modern life. "Reynard the Fox" possesses vigor of movement; variety of color; and strongly individualized characters. These representatives of the English countryside are presented in a few dashing but powerful strokes by Mr. Masefield. In the description of the assemblage, Chaucer has found a worthy rival in the person of his admirer and disciple. Nothing better of its kind has been written in English since the Prologue to the Canterbury Tales. The realism of Chaucer in the Prologue is entirely objective and it may be noted that Mr. Masefield has chosen to describe his characters objectively, as they have gathered for the hunt. Just as Chaucer sat back and observed the Pilgrims pass before him, Mr. Masefield sits back and takes note of the hunters as they arrived at the stable. Just as Chaucer's Prologue breaths the spirit of fourteenth century England, Mr. Masefield's assemblage breaths the very spirit of present day England. It breathes of the "pure", "envigorating" atmosphere of the "glorious English countryside."[1]

In "Reynard the Fox" and the Prologue the setting is almost identical - the Pilgrims came to the Tabard Inn to put up for the night and adjoining the Inn is a hostelry where their mounts were stabled. Mr. Masefield opens his narrative with a strikingly realistic picture of the stable adjoining the Inn where great preparations are being made for the impending hunt. To one who is acquainted in any way with stables the description is flawless; to those who have never seen a

1. Expressions used by Hamilton.

stable it is unforgettably depicted. The minutest details are pictured with surprising clarity and the poet's suggestive power of sound finds expression in describing the many varied noises common to the hostelry. The fracas made by the grooms; the stablemen; the stamping, restless motions of the horses; the munching of horses eating oats and hay - all, are matchlessly given. Mr. Masefield does not omit from the picture the various odors familiar to the stable; the tobacco used by the men; the -

"strong ammonia flavour
Of horses' stables and the savour
Of saddle - paste and polish spirit."

The entire scene is unsurpassed in accuracy of portrayal.

After the very successful and masterful introduction to the surroundings, the poet begins to describe the members of the hunt in the order of their arrival. Here, we note, that the poet, unlike Chaucer, does not begin by introducing the man of superior rank but the man of common origin; the man who constitutes the backbone of the nation. The same spirit pervades both productions - the congenial, festival spirit which unites all men, regardless of rank. The Knight of the Prologue and Sir Peter Bynd of "Reynard the Fox" are measured by exactly the same standards: the Knight loved knighthood, faithfulness, honor, liberality and courtesy. He had served in many wars, full valiantly, to uphold the honor and glory of England; he never spoke discourtesy to any living creature but was a perfect, gentle, knight. This very description fits Sir Peter. Of course the phrasing is not quaint but these very characteristics mentioned by Chaucer are embodied in the nobleman described by Mr. Masefield. Sir Peter was:

"Past sixty now, though hearty still,

A living picture of good-will,
An old, grave soldier, sweet and kind,
A courtier with a knightly mind,
Who felt whatever thing he thought.
His face was scarred, for he had fought
Five wars for us. Within his face
Courage and power had their place,
Rough energy, decision, force.
He smiled about him from his horse,
He had a welcome and salute
For all, on horse or wheel or foot,
Whatever kind of life each followed."

Although approximately six centuries have elapsed from the time Chaucer wrote his description of the knightly character we find that time has not altered the standards by which a noble man is to be measured.

Likewise, the characteristics of the young Squire are reflected in Richard Frome, the Doctor's son; both are handsome, jolly youths of great physical stature; gallant, modest, and courteous. As Chaucer seems to be very fond of the month of May, everything that is beautiful and joyful reminds him of this particular season - the Squire therefore is as fresh as the month of May. Now, Mr. Masefield, whether consciously or unconsciously uses this time of the season to illustrate the freshness of Richard:- "As merry as a yearling is
In Maytime in a clover patch."

The Ploughman of the "Prologue" finds expression in old Baldock, whom Mr. Masefield introduces as he comes into the stable yard. Chaucer's Ploughman is a hard working, deeply religious citizen. The Ploughman of the twentieth century is not unlike his forefather, possessing the same worthy qualities with the exception that old Baldock does not seem to possess as much of this world's goods as does the Chaucerean character.

Perhaps it might be said that Mr. Masefield has an advantage over Chaucer in that he has an opportunity to describe with ac-

curacy many types of woman. Chaucer had only two, but the modern writer depicts four or five individual types. Squire Harridew's daughter Carrie, however, is a slightly modernized Prioress. Both have many characteristics in common: both are beautiful: both sing well, but Chaucer's Prioress sang divine service well, while Carrie -

"Sang mild, pretty senseless songs
Of sunsets; Heav'n and lover's wrongs,"

Mr. Masefield's Parson is no differently or no less vividly portrayed than the Monk in the Prologue. Each find joy in living a hearty, healthy, sporting life rather than pouring over books, and preaching sermons.

The passage beginning:-

"The parson was a manly one,
His jolly eyes were bright with fun.
His jolly mouth was well inclined
To cry aloud his jolly mind
To everyone, in jolly terms." -

to the end of the description is equal to Chaucer's masterful description.

Mr. Masefield's sailor is described in a few short lines but proves equally as effective as the somewhat longer description by Chaucer. Mr. Masefield portrays with clinching strokes the sailor -

"Steer Harpit came from Rowell Hill,
A small, frail man, all heart and will,
A sailor as his voice betrayed."

The Parson's sporting wife bears a striking likeness to the Goodwife from Bath - both are stout, full of life - "With red, quick, kindly, manly face." There is no opportunity to point out likenesses between the Doctour of Phisyk described by Chaucer and the Doctor pictured by Mr. Masefield - one is the

exact antithesis of the other. From Chaucer's description it is very evident that doctors maintained that an extraordinary knowledge of astrology and drugs for the purpose of administering aid to his patients was necessary. Mr. Masefield's typical physician -

"A smiling silent man whose brain
Knew all of every secret pain
In every man and woman there."

Mr. Masefield's Sladd carries us back to the prologue of the Manciple's Tale, to the singularly realistic portrayal of the drunken Cook whose miserable condition excused him from attempting to tell his tale -

"Sladd's big fat face was white as chalk,
His mind went wandering, swift yet solemn,-
. . . . .
He said "This road is full of jolts.
I shall be seasick riding here.
O damn last night with that liqueur."

Included in Part I, Mr. Masefield, gives us a truly splendid description of the hounds as they are held in leash before the hunt begins.

"The hounds drew round him on the green,
Arrogant, Daffodil and Queen,
Closest, but all in little space.
Some lolled their tongues, some made grimace,
Yawning, or tilting nose in quest,
All stood and looked about with zest,
They were uneasy as they waited.
Their sires and dams had been well-mated.
They were a lovely pack for looks;
Their forelegs drumsticked without crooks,
Straight, without overtread or bend,
Muscled to gallop to the end,
With neat feet round as any cat's.
Great chested, muscled in the slats,
Bright, clean, short-coated, broad in shoulder.
With stag-like eyes that seemed to smoulder.
The heads well-cocked, the clean necks strong;
Brows broad, ears close, the muzzles long;
And all like racers in the thighs;
Their noses exquisitely wise,
Their minds being memories of smells;

Their voices like a ring of bells;
Their sterns all spirit, cock and feather;
Their colors like the English weather,
Magpie and hare, and badger-pye,
Like minglings in a double dye,
Some smutty-nosed, some tan, none bald;
Their manners were to come when called,
Their courage like a banner blown.
Their joy to push him out of cover,
And hunt him till they rolled him over.
They were as game as Robert Dover."

Following Part I - which might be interpreted as a Prologue to the ensuing narrative which rivets our attention and sympathy upon the shaggy, hunted animal - Mr. Masefield's power rises to such a height that the reader forgets he is reading poetry and follows breathlessly, actually experiencing the intense pain endured by the poor dumb beast who is being sacrificed merely to gratify one of man's selfish desires. Throughout this racy narrative our sympathies never waver for one minute, Reynard is the object of our admiration and pity. Our hearts race along with the quarry, rest, hope, despair, and suffer with the heroic little animal which in the end cleverly eludes the clutches of the merciless hunters. It is incomprehensible how man can so thoroughly enjoy a sport which terrifies and makes life so agonizing to a weak, defenseless, animal. There is nothing better in English narrative verse and which so completely overwhelms the emotions of the reader than the passage beginning -

"And here, as he ran to the huntsman's yelling,
The fox first felt that the pace was telling,
His body and lungs seemed all grown old,
His legs less certain, his heart less bold."

It is with a sigh of complete satisfaction that the reader witnesses Reynard's triumph, he does not feel deeply the misfortune which has come upon the fox which was really sacrificed, but re-

joices that the brave hearted, courageous, plucky, crafty Reynard escaped unscarred from the huntsmen. A more stirring narrative in verse has never been written - the accuracy of fact and the psychological reaction produced on the reader is absolute proof of Mr. Masefield's realism. Reynard is a splendid poem with scarcely a single dragging line in it. Its realism is unlike that in Mr. Masefield's previous productions because it takes us away from the coarse life of the sea, the crime and slime of the scum of the earth, and carries us out into the pure, stimulating, atmosphere of the healthy English countryside. "Reynard the Fox" is an exciting tale and likely to remain Masefield's supreme achievement in narrative. The thrilling undertone of passion for England and the Englishman sounds in noble contrast to the dark and violent tragedy of the individual human being that we find in Mr. Masefield's earlier narratives. In "Reynard," Mr. Masefield follows Chaucer very closely in that he gives us an objective study of social action rather than a subjective study of individual development.

It is impossible for one who has had the pleasure of reading Chaucer's famous Nun's Priest's Tale not to recognize a similarity both in verse and attack in Mr. Masefield's "The Widow in the Bye Street." Both narratives begin the story directly, with no unnecessary details, the facts are revealed immediately and told in an amazingly simple manner. The first stanza of each poem indicates sufficiently the likenesses - The Nun's Priest's Tale -

"A poure wydwe, somdel stope in age,
Was whylom dwelling in a narwe cotage,
Bisyde a grove, stonding in a dale.

This widwe, of which I telle yow my tale,
Sin thilke day that she was last a wyf,
In pacience ladde a ful simple lyf,
For litel was hir catel and hir rente."

Mr. Masefield's first stanza gives practically the same description as does Chaucer's:-

"Down Bye Street, in a little Shropshire town,
There lived a widow with her only son:
She had no wealth nor title to renown,
Nor any joyous hours, never one.
She rose from ragged mattress before sun,
And stitched all day until her eyes were red,
And had to stitch because her man was dead."

The realistic descriptions of both widow and environment in both poems is immediately recognized. Chaucer's tale is a retold story but he improves upon the old story by giving to his tale a heightened color and realism by introducing a suitable background. He goes out into the country and paints a peasant's cottage, such as must have been a matter of common experience to the readers of his day; a simple house of two rooms, with its sooty 'hall' serving as kitchen, hen house, barn, and small 'bower' where the widow and her daughters slept. We are given a view of everyday peasant life, its hard, unpleasant work, its meagre returns, and its narrowing interests; but in spite of all these disadvantages it is not an entirely unhappy life. It is possible to compare Chaucer's realism thus far to the opening stanzas of "The Widow in the Bye Street" - what is true of Chaucer's widow applies in every respect to Masefield's corresponding character, with the possible exception that the house in the Bye Street was not a combination house and barn.

As the narratives progress one is a pure and simple comedy; the other, a sordid tragedy. Chaucer's sly humor crops out throughout his tale and a scene which portrays faithfully the peasant life occurs when the widow, her daughters, the neighbors, and all the animals in the barnyard, in wild bedlam join in the hue and cry after the marauding fox. The scene given, presents an unrivalled picture of vividness and realism.

Just as Chaucer gained his powerful grip on reality by portraying the common, ordinary events of his day and the people with whom he was most familiar, Mr. Masefield has laid claim upon reality through the same means. In "Reynard the Fox", the modern poet has proved himself to be a worthy disciple and a very possible rival of Chaucer.

## V. MR. MASEFIELD'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE ADVANCE OF POETRY

Perhaps one of the most notable services that Mr. Masefield has accomplished is that he has made poetry so interesting, vivid, and real, that he has appealed to thousands who have previously imagined poetry as something quite beyond the reach of the poorly educated or the uneducated. The aim of our poet is to chronicle the stages of all life; to capture the simplicity, sincerity, and catholicity of Chaucer; to make his works monuments of naturalness. Although he carries Wordsworth's poetic theory to the very extreme, the material from which he draws is never common or unclean. He has made his poetry fit exactly the time, place, and the man, regardless of the opinions of others who think the Muse should be clothed in more delicate language. Mr. Masefield is a poet of democracy, of submerged and squalid democracy, and it is perhaps due to this fact that his works have been so cordially and sympathetically received in America, the land of Democracy. His poems have served as an impetus to the American reader, more than that, they have encouraged many of our talented young men and women to dare to express their thoughts in their own, individual manner, unrestrained by the traditional conventions, hitherto held so rigidly both in England and America.

Mr. Masefield has sung more intimately and more lovingly of the sea than any other English poet: his familiarly and intense love of the sea is depicted in the "Sea Ballads" and "Dauber" springs spontaneously from an innate love of the sea coupled with his extensive experience. England's green and merry land must count him one of her apostles of beauty.

"Reynard the Fox" and "Right Royal" breath the very spirit of the English countryside; the fox-hunt, and steeplechase which constitute the universal sports of the Englishman are matchlessly described, and if illusion and compassion be the test of the power of narrative verse Mr. Masefield has not been surpassed by any traditional, or approached by any contemporary poet.

Mr. Masefield's knowledge of nature and human nature is not confined to the sea and the countryside, but also embraces a startling knowledge of the life of the travelling circus. He is a poet of pity, a poet of justice, a poet who feels deeply and sincerely for the poor, broken creatures of God. There is no condescension in his manner, no indication of contempt or disdain for the unfortunate, but rather an intense, burning, overwhelming love, and a perfect understanding of --

"The scorned - the rejected - the men hemmed in with spears -
. . . . .
the ranker, the tramp of the road,
The slave with the sack on his shoulders pricked on with the goad,
The man with too weighty a burden, too weary a load. . ."

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